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The effects of a genre-based pedagogy that exploits connections between reading and writing

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The effects of a genre-based pedagogy that exploits connections between reading and writing (abstract)

Although reading and writing are interconnected language skills (Clark, 1996; Conrad & Biber, 2001; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000), their interrelations are rarely addressed in educational contexts. This situation is likely to impede students' literacy development. Therefore, the importance of raising awareness of the interconnections between separate language skills has been emphasised (Hendrix & Van der Westen, 2018; Meesterschapsteams Nederlands, 2018). Genre-based pedagogy is suggested as a means to foster this awareness. The aim of my project is to test whether a genre-based pedagogy that exploits the connections between reading and writing improves the aforementioned skills, and genre knowledge and awareness.

Genre-based pedagogy provides a solid framework for connecting reading and writing in secondary school as it enables students to understand texts in a broader societal context. Common elements in the different genre schools (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010) are explicit teaching of genre characteristics, discussion of ways in which genre characteristics contribute to the meaning and effects of texts, and discussion of genre boundaries (Swales, 2009).

Two genre-based lesson series focussing on news articles and columns have been piloted (2018-2019) and will be implemented in Dutch secondary schools (2019-2020). The subjects are 15- to 16-year-olds in grade 10. Classes will be randomly assigned to the news article or the column, thereby functioning as each other's control group. Pre- and post-tests to assess reading and writing abilities in both genres will be administered as well as questionnaires regarding genre knowledge and awareness.

For both conditions, two distinct genre elements are the focus of instruction: the use and effects of adjectives and adverbs, and the use and effects of figurative speech. These elements have different functions and effects in the two genres. Students will learn to recognize, interpret and use these features in reading and writing.

The effects of a genre-based pedagogy that exploits connections between reading and writing (extended summary)

Introduction

Although reading and writing are interconnected language skills, their interrelations are often not addressed in educational contexts. Across the globe, teachers do not often make connections between reading and writing in the classroom. This situation also holds in the Netherlands, where core curriculum standards are described separately for reading and writing, and textbooks present reading and writing as separate skills. This situation is likely to impede students' literacy development. Therefore, Dutch educational researchers and reformers emphasize the importance of raising awareness of the interconnections between separate language skills (Hendrix & Van der Westen, 2018; Meesterschapsteams Nederlands, 2018; Vanhooren, Pereira, & Bolhuis, 2017).

Genre-based pedagogy is suggested as a means for fostering this awareness. The aim of my research project is to test whether a genre-based pedagogy that exploits the connections between reading and writing improves both reading and writing skills, and genre knowledge and awareness. At the JURE conference I will present the results of a pilot with a genre-based lesson series in grade 10 of general secondary education (havo) in the Netherlands.

Theoretical background

Research on language and communication indicates that reading and writing are highly interconnected (Clark, 1996; Conrad & Biber, 2001; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). In adolescence, language skills develop in a non-linear way and influence one another (Berninger, 2000; Shanahan, 2006). International meta-analyses suggest that reading skills may benefit from writing instruction and vice versa (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham & Harris, 2017; Graham et al., 2018). Therefore, integrating reading and writing education seems promising.

Genre-based pedagogy provides a solid framework to build on when connecting reading and writing in secondary school. Over the last decades, genre-based pedagogy has gained popularity and has proven to be successful in enabling students to deal with texts from a broader societal perspective. Although different views on genre-based pedagogy exist (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010), common elements are explicit teaching of genre characteristics, discussion of the way in which genre characteristics contribute to the meaning and effects of texts, and discussion of genre boundaries (Swales, 2009).

Up till now, genre-based pedagogy is predominately applied in separate reading and writing lessons and in content based language instruction. My study will investigate what the effects of a genre-based pedagogy are on adolescents' reading and writing skills and genre knowledge and awareness.

Classroom intervention

Two lesson series based on genre pedagogy (one about reading and writing news articles and one about reading and writing columns) are being designed and tested (2018-2019) and will be implemented in secondary schools in the Netherlands (2019-2020). The subjects are 15 to 16 year old students in grade 10 (havo 4). The participating classes will be randomly assigned to either the news article condition or the column condition. The two groups will function as each other's control group. All students will take a pre- and a post-test on their reading and writing abilities in both genres and fill in questionnaires about their genre knowledge and awareness.

For both conditions, two distinct genre elements are the focus of instruction: the use and effects of adjectives and adverbs and the use and effects of figurative speech. These elements have different functions and therefore different effects in the two genres. Students will learn to recognize, interpret and use these features in reading and writing.

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